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Southern Style: Kristin Davis Does Line for Belk

By Whitney Beckett

"SEX AND THE CITY" ISN'T THE ONLY THING ON KRISTIN DAVIS' MIND: SHE'S ALSO THINKING ABOUT CLOTHES AND THE SOUTH.

The actress is partnering with Belk Inc., the Charlotte, N.C.-based retailer, to launch a Kristin Davis better-priced line. The exclusive line, which will be carried in 126 of Belk's 307 doors for fall and then expand into more than 200 doors for spring, will have the biggest launch in the history of the \$3.82 billion retailer, which celebrated its 120th anniversary last week.

"I grew up shopping at Belk," said Davis, a Columbia, S.C., native, best known for her role as the feminine Charlotte York on "Sex and the City." "It was the nicest store we had, and I'd save my allowance to go to Belk."

H.W. McKay Belk, the retailer's president and chief merchandising officer, declined to project sales volume for the line, which will retail from \$30 to \$240 when it hits stores at the end of August. But Belk said the brand would be a "focal point, with prime locations" in "modern, clean and tasteful" shop-in-shops ranging from 500 to more than 1,000 square feet. It's the retailer's first celebrity apparel line.

"Kristin is a hometown hero to our customers where our stores are," said Belk, alluding to the 16 Southern states in which the retailer operates.

The Kristin Davis brand is launching with sportswear, activewear, sleepwear, handbags, jewelry, belts and footwear, and for spring and beyond, it likely will expand into other categories, possibly including home, in which Davis said she was particularly interested.

The line is being produced by LFUSA Regatta, the proprietary brand group of Li & Fung, whose exclusive offerings also include Kohl's Simply Vera Vera Wang and Daisy Fuentes lines, Wal-Mart's Metro 7 and the new LL Cool J collections for Sears.

"Our proprietary business model makes our job much easier," said Regatta chief executive officer Haim Dabah. "We know we are designing for one store's customers."

The Kristin Davis brand will sit in the better arena, which has been soft for Belk and the market as a whole. Better-priced brands such as O Oscar, Nautica and Sigrid Olsen recently have dropped out, and other mainstays, like the Liz Claiborne brand and Calvin Klein's better label, are long suffering.

"It's become clearer and clearer that our customers want more on our better floor," Belk said. "This is an opportunity to put something there that's much stronger. Customers are gravitating to what's new in the stores. What's old and hasn't really changed is not that exciting."

Belk will market the launch with a print advertising

campaign in national and regional fashion magazines, plus the actress will make personal appearances in stores in the fall, "which is exciting because I have family all over the South," said Davis, who by then will be working on an independent film in which she is starring as well as making her executive producing debut.

"We're giving her a good excuse to come home," Belk added.

Of course, it doesn't hurt that the announcement of the launch coincides with the "Sex and the City" movie premiere, though all sides claim the timing is coincidental, and that they had been in talks before the movie was even green-lighted.

Davis said she has been considering the possibility of creating a fashion line, but that she wanted a match that made sense. "Obviously Sarah Jessica [Parker] has gone bravely into the world of design and created something she believed in," said Davis, referring to her "Sex and the City" co-star's mass-priced Bitten collection at Steve & Barry's. While Parker wanted to produce affordable clothes that her family could have bought when she was growing up, Davis liked Belk's Southern sensibilities.

"In the South, there is a feminine quality that often gets lost in high fashion," Davis explained. "Belk understands."

Davis has been actively involved in the conception of the line.

"It really started in my closet, which for me is more exciting than going shopping and just seeing what already is available," Davis said. "I have these classic pieces I've have for six, 10 years that I hold onto."

In her closet, you'd find lines such as James Perse, Milly, Prada, Chanel, Michael Kors and Dolce & Gabbana — "but the Dolce wasn't a good fit for our line," Davis said. "We had to weed things out, and I'd think about what I'd travel with."

Davis said there's "a lot of crossover" between her style and that of her alter ego, Charlotte York. "Charlotte dresses in a very feminine way, and I love her playful nature," she said.

The apparel line is full of A-line skirts and dresses, blouses and other pieces that easily can be taken day to night or casual to evening. The pieces include feminine details like flowers and jewels, and the fabric weights are sensitive to the South's milder climate. The line is offered in sizes 2 through 14. "I don't even wear a zero, so they're not allowed," Davis said. "High fashion is almost a disservice. I don't want to be perpetuating that idea that, because certain actresses wear a certain size, you should, too. We wanted the clothes to fit a variety of body types, and we tried to make everything simple and wearable and flattering."

When asked for how long the deal was, Davis looked at Mr. Belk ("I like to call you 'Mr. Belk' sometimes because it's funny," Davis explained. "It's part of the landscape of the South."), saying perkily, "I think it's forever."



A look from the Kristin Davis line.

